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ABSTRACT

A policy statement on the president and governing board developed by the Committee on Policies and Purposes of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) is presented, and the roles, responsibilities, and relationships of the governing board and the college president are outlined. The role of the U.S. college or university president is central to the successful development of institutions of quality and stability. The roles of universities and colleges and of the governing board are also defined. Presidential responsibilities include the following: (1) direction of current and long-range planning; (2) development and maintenance of academic programs to achieve the institutions's mission and goals; (3) development and maintenance of an appropriate personnel system; and (4) representation of the university or college to relevant external constituencies. Relations between the board and the president should reflect mutual respect and confidence at all times. Board/president relationships should include direct access to the governing board, governing board requests for the president's advice and recommendations on all matters, and presidential authority to recommend personnel actions subject to contractual and legal limitations. (SM)

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The President and the Governing Board

Conditions for Effective Leadership

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The following policy statement was developed by the Committee on Policies and Purposes of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and approved by the association membership at the 28th annual meeting on November 22, 1988.

Historically, the role of the college or university president in the United States has been central to the successful development of institutions of quality and stability. The requirement for leadership has been, and will remain, critical.

Governing boards have the ultimate legal responsibility for the development, operation, and management of institutions under their authority. Faculties and other constituencies share, in varying degrees, responsibility for helping to develop major policy recommendations. The president has a crucial role in the development and maintenance of institutional quality and stability as the only administrative agent of the governing board and as a representative of each constituency involved with the institution.

Based on these assumptions, this statement outlines the basic roles, responsibilities, and relationships of the governing board and the college president that characterize the more effective institutions of higher education in the United States.

The exact definition of each presidency varies widely and reflects the diversity of institutional governance and mission. Indeed, it is difficult to use a standard terminology in discussing the role of the president because of the existence of different titles, institutional missions, governing relationships, influence of other external agencies, and internal conditions of employment. This statement focuses on the governing board and the president as chief executive officer of a campus, although the general principles apply similarly to system presidents and chancellors and chief executive officers of individual campuses, whether reporting directly to a board or within a system structure. Further, these principles apply in both unionized and nonunionized institutions.

Fundamental to these general principles is the axiom that the president must have the authority necessary to fulfill the responsibilities and expectations of the office. As the president's authority derives from the governing board, it is imperative that the board and president form a mutually supportive relationship and have a common understanding of the president's role in institutional leadership.

Role of Universities and Colleges

The role of the university or college in the United States continues the historic functions of the discovery of new knowledge, the conservation and practical application of existing knowledge, and the communication of that knowledge to students and the general public. Therefore, the primary missions of colleges and universities are teaching, research, and service. Although the balance among these functions will vary from time to time within each institution and among institutions, it is essential that the institution's current mission be clearly articulated and that the president be appropriately empowered to achieve that mission and to ensure institutional quality and financial stability.

Governing Board

With a few exceptions, the governing board is the final institutional authority. In the case of public institutions established by constitutional or statutory provisions, limitations may exist to the board's authority either under the Constitution or applicable state law. Nevertheless, the governing board is responsible for protecting the institution against inappropriate external and internal influences and intrusions and for preserving academic freedom.

The board should delegate authority to the president commensurate with his or her responsibilities. In a centralized system, the board may delegate all or a portion of that responsibility to the chief executive officer of the system who, in turn, either delegates to the chief executive officers of individual campuses or acts as a facilitator to the chief executive officers of the campuses in their exercise of the authority delegated to them by the governing board.

The selection of the president is the governing board's most important decision. Once having made that decision, the governing board must ensure that the president is vested with appropriate authority to carry out the duties and responsibilites for which he or she is to be held accountable. The governing board (and if the institution is part of a multicollege system, its central staff) must operate in a manner that does not erode the authority of the president but rather supports his or her authority and the integrity of the institution.

Presidential Responsibilities

As chief executive officer, the president is responsible for recommending broad policies and personnel to the board and for implementing those policies approved by the board. In addition, the president must create and maintain a vision and sense of common purpose for the institution and its constituencies that develops and sustains institutional direction and self-esteem. The governing board should recognize that it, through the president, holds final responsibility for the health, safety, and welfare of the institution and its personnel, including students. The president's primary responsibility is that of administering the institution in the achievement of its mission, including education, research, and service in accordance with the laws of the state, the policies of the governing board, and the resources of the institution. Specific responsibilities include but are not limited to the following:

1. The administration of board policies regulating institutional mission, goals and objectives, instructional programs, research, public service, financial affairs, student affairs, and physical facilities

2. The direction of current and long-range planning

3. The development and maintenance of academic programs to achieve the institution's mission and goals

4. The development and maintenance of an appropriate administrative organization and governance structure to facilitate the most efficient and effective utilization of institutional resources in the achievement of the institution's mission and goals

5. The development and maintenance of a personnel system concerned with the recruitment, selection, assignment, supervision, evaluation, promotion and retention, or tenure of all personnel employed by the institution

6. The planning and development of the means for securing and maintaining the resources necessary for the achievement of the institution's mission at the highest possible level of quality, including the presentation to appropriate funding agencies of the needs of the institution

7. The preparation and presentation of the annual operating and capital budgets and the institutional allocation and supervision of all appropriated and other funds

8. The development and maintenance of the facilities, materials, equipment, and services necessary for the support of institutional functions

9. The communication of the policies and views of the board to the institutional community and other constituencies and, conversely, communication of the views of the university's constituencies on appropriate issues to the governing board

10. The presentation of information to the governing board about the current and prospective condition of the institution, including its goals, accomplishments, and potential problems

11. The representation of the university or college to relevant external constituencies

12. The termination of his or her association with the institution in a professional manner that does not unnecessarily discredit or damage public confidence in the institution or its governing board.

Board/President Relationships

Relations between the board and the president should reflect mutual respect and confidence and should encourage and support the president in the exercise of institutional leadership even in the presence of opposition of one or more constituencies.

1. The president must have direct access to the governing board, or, in the case of a centralized system, to the appropriate authority charged with presenting institutional proposals, budgets, and problems to the governing board. Members of the governing board or other centralized authority should not meet formally, either individually or collectively, with any representatives of the institution's various constituencies without the president's presence or agreement. The governing board should not meet without the president or his or her representative except in unusual circumstances, such as personnel matters relating to the president's position.

2. The governing board or appropriate central authority should ask the president for his or her advice and recommendations on all matters before the board which may affect the institution. No changes affecting an institution in any regard should be made by the governing board (or a coordinating board, commission for higher education, central staff, or other state agencies) without appropriate advice and recommendations from the president of that institution. The governing board or other governing authority should clearly distinguish between official communications to or from the president and the comments of individual board members and officers.

3. The governing board should hold the president free from any personal liability as long as he or she is acting in his or her capacity as the board's chief executive officer.

4. The governing board should evaluate the performance of the president in a manner that will enhance and strengthen his or her effectiveness as chief executive officer of the institution.

5. The governing board should ensure a reasonable degree of economic security for the president so that he or she is encouraged and supported in taking the risks inherent in leadership. It may do so by providing him or her with a contract for a specified term, with tenure in an appropriate academic department, or with a guaranteed period of notice or other appropriate means. The governing board should also provide appropriate transitional assistance.

6. In the event that a board decides to terminate the president's service as president, the termination should be handled in a professional manner that does not damage public confidence in the governing board or the institution or unnecessarily discredit the president or damage his or her reputation.

7. The president should be provided with sufficient administrative and staff support to discharge responsibilities and expectations placed upon him or her by the governing board.

8. The president should have sole authority to recommend personnel action subject to contractual and legal limitations and to consultation with other appropriate constituencies.

9. While the governing board or the president may delegate responsibilities to other campus constituencies, the president must retain authority to initiate and approve actions necessary to the fulfillment of his or her responsibilities.

The American cation of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) is a leading higher education association that represents more than 370 public colleges and universities across the United States and in Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Virgin Islands.

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